

FISH SUFFOCATING IN VAN CORTLANDT

Bodies Washed Up on Lake Shore—Park Aide Says Silt Cut Off Oxygen

By McCANDLISH PHILLIPS

Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx, clothed in the light green loveliness of May, is giving off an odor of dead fish in its south central sector.

The margin of its lake is lined with dead perch and assorted other fish from thumb-length size to 11 inches long.

This is the third year in a row that fish have died en masse at the lake. The problem has perplexed and troubled several city departments.

"Last year, we found that the fish weren't getting enough oxygen," a spokesman for the Department of Water Supply, Gas and Electricity said.

Silt Washed Into Lake

Dead fish started washing up on the lake shores Friday. A Park Department official, who had conferred with experts from the State Conservation Department, said it appeared that heavy rains and flash floods last Thursday had loaded the lake with silt, washed down from hills and banks around the lake. The silt caused heavy sedimentation and also hung suspended in the water, preventing the fish from getting oxygen, he said.

He described the victims as "salvage fish, yellow perch and guppies mainly, of small value." The Conservation Department will restock the lake soon, he added.

"We put new water into the lake by opening the valve and letting fresh city water pour in. Next we'll net the dead ones up from rowboats and take them to the incinerator," he said.

Suffocation Suspected

Dr. Ross F. Nigrelli, pathologist of the New York Aquarium at Coney Island, said previous investigations led him to believe that the fish had died, not of poison or disease but of suffocation.

"With the rise in temperature and increasing daylight, you get a very dense growth of algae that is photosynthesizing," he said. "They produce considerable amounts of oxygen by day. But at night they utilize the oxygen, depleting the water of it, and they produce carbon dioxide, putting excess amounts of [it] into the environment."

"This prevents oxygen from being taken up by the gills, causing anoxia, or suffocation."

There was a stagnant-looking, filmy brownish green scum on the lake yesterday; occasionally it was broken by the snout of a fish apparently coming up for air. The man at the Department of Water Supply said there was "nothing polluted about the lake at all."

The air was another matter. "I came here for fresh air and look what I get," said a housewife pushing a stroller.